By DAN YAKIR

SPECIAL UNIT 2

There's more monstrous mayhem to uncover as the supernatural supercops handle a second season caseload.

Creator Evan Katz promises more unusual cases for *Special Unit 2* monsterbusters Captain Page (Richard Gant), Nick O'Malley (Michael Landes), Kate Benson (Alexondra Lee) and Carl (Danny Woodburn).

This season, O'Malley will come face-to-face with the creature who killed his partner (and it *isn't* this gargoyle).

Special Unit 2 made enough of a splash during its first, six-episode season to be renewed. Evan Katz, the series' executive producer, creator and principal writer, now believes that the show has been given a chance to prove it has "legs." But the production's move to shoot in Vancouver instead of LA is a major change that will affect many aspects of the UPN series.

"Moving a production to Canada, frankly, is *always* economic," Katz candidly comments, "but I think it'll have a positive impact on the show, because it lets me put more money on the screen, build things better, have more creatures and more action as well as work on grander and more numerous sets. When you're only shooting six episodes, it's very difficult to do certain things, especially without a big star or loads of money.

"The thrust of the second season," Katz emphasizes, "is going to be more on character, more on developing a mythology for the show. We're introducing a new character to the precinct, Jonathan [played by Jonathan Togo], who explains things, and a recurring villain named Y, who was ultimately responsible for murdering Nick's partner years ago."

Katz first noticed Togo in a Jack in the Box commercial. "He's 23 and he alternates between incredible bursts of enthusiasm and insecurity. The character is one of the team, a xeno-biologist, so he's a fan of all the stuff they're dealing with."

Jonathan's relationship with the other *Special Unit 2* characters is still in flux. "We're finding it, frankly," offers Katz. "And I think the best way to do that is to see what the actors can find. The actors have discovered this really fun relationship between Jonathan and Captain Page [Richard Gant]—Jonathan desperately wants to be the captain's friend, and Page doesn't want anything to do with him. It's pretty funny."

Missing Links

A second season has given Katz the chance to elaborate on the *Special Unit 2* mythos as supercops Nick O'Malley (Michael Landes) and Kate Benson (Alexondra Lee) continue their investigations. "The most exciting stuff is the slow layering and unfolding of our series' mythology," Katz asserts. "Like, what's going to happen when in the second episode, they have the creature that killed Nick's partner? Well, they have to use this creature to catch another of its kind, and in the course of that investigation, Nick discovers that his partner was killed on orders. It's part of a conspiracy. And we'll discover way down the line that it's by this character who's trying to become the king of the Links, Y.

"Y has been around for centuries, a millennium actually," he describes. "And there's a Judeo-Christian crossover—he's like a fallen angel, and at one point he had power over this species called the Links, and he wants to return to his seat of glory. We're keeping his look a secret for now and casting as we speak." Fan favorite John de Lancie will play Y.

In the first season, each episode had its own villain—old familiar types like werewolves and mummies, and new ones like fatty slimeballs. "We generally have more creatures than we know what to do with," Katz maintains, "but it's great to have recurring villains, and to work on a deeper level than just a different creature every week.

All Photos: Copyright 2001 Paramount Pictures

Katz believes the show went "a little bit too far" into the fantastic last season with the Merman.

"We try very hard. I go on the supposition that the audience is *very* sophisticated, and you really need to outguess them as much as possible and surprise them. There must be a reason to tell a story with each of these creatures. If we're going to do a mummy, it has to be something a little different than what we've seen before [thus, a samurai mummy in "The Wraps"], and if we're going to do a werewolf, same thing. We make up something from scratch, like our medical waste creature. Same idea."

According to Katz, one of the distinctions the series' writers are very clear about is the difference between the monster and the story. "The monster in the lycanthropy show was a werewolf, but the story was about Nick getting bitten," he relates. "The monster in the medical waste episode was this thing made up of human fat, but the story was really about Nick and his ex-partner. We want the audience to desperately discover the show's mythology and be invested in it."

Getting wild with Wall Street werewolves led to Katz's favorite "traumatic" episode.

"We generally have more creatures than we know what to do with."

Much of that depends on the design of the creatures that Nick and Kate encounter and exterminate. Production designer Patrick (*Godzilla*) Tatopoulos continues to give these monstrosities spectacular shape and form. "He makes me very happy," Katz says. "The flow of creativity goes both ways, between writer and designer. There are no rules. Generally, we come up with the idea for the creatures, then he designs them. But when he designs them, he really *adds* to them. When we did the Spider Woman, we had no idea what the hell to do, and he really helped figure out how these things burst out of it, and that became part of the character."

Quirky Creatures

Despite the familiar ring to *Special Unit*'s format, Katz doesn't feel especially close to, or worried about, what other genre shows do—even at a time when *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has become his new next-door neighbor at UPN and SCI FI's *The Chronicle* is exploring similar subject matter with a comparable quirky tone.

"*Buffy* and *Angel* are really their own things and they have developed their own worlds," he says. "*Buffy* is a coming-of-age drama, and *The Chronicle*—I've watched it and I don't think it's on the radar. The only thing we have in common with *Buffy* and *Angel* is we both try to be scary and funny—*Buffy* more so than *Angel*, obviously. But *Special Unit 2* is an action show as well, which I don't think *The Chronicle* is supposed to be. I try not to pay too much attention to other shows. It's hard enough to try to square our own standards."

Those standards keep evolving, as the creator and writers try to improve on the show. Early on, Katz announced that *Special Unit 2* was going to be reality-based with plenty of humor. That equilibrium between realism and mirth, he believes, was marred on occasion.

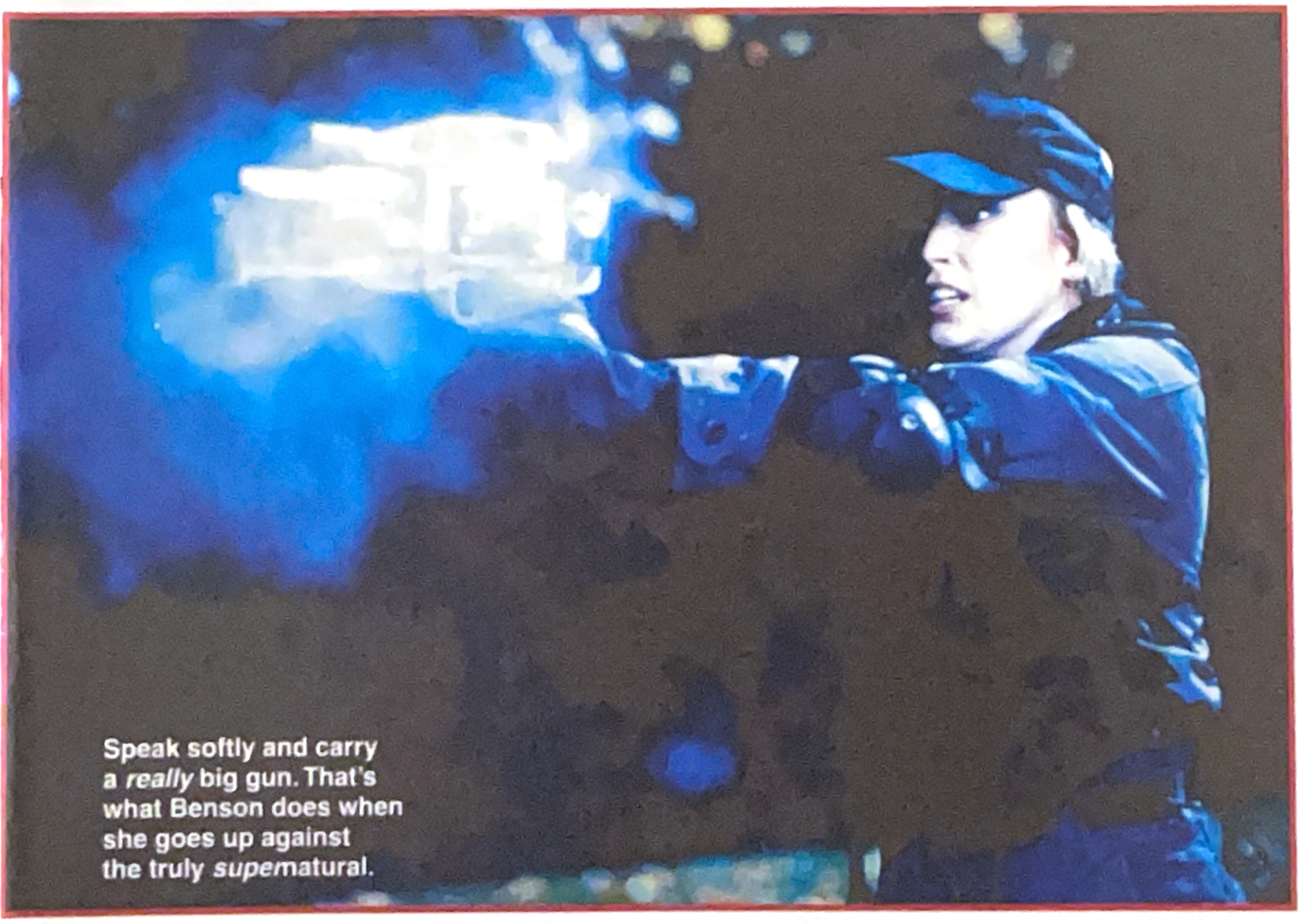
"Last year, we went a little bit too far with a creature like the Merman," Katz admits, pointing out a particular case where he was perhaps too eager to make a splash by coming up with a strikingly different invention.

By contrast, the exec producer singles out the werewolves of "The Pack" as his favorite "traumatic" episode, and the medical waste man as the best "comedic" chapter. The Spider Woman entry also gets a special mention.

Not that viewers can expect less whimsy in upcoming cases. "One thing I've discovered is that even when I'm *not* being offbeat, people think the material is very offbeat. So I don't think that's going to happen, even if I try."

The powers that be at UPN also accept *Special Unit 2*'s whimsical side as a given. "We wouldn't be anywhere if they were fighting us on that," he argues. "I mean, it's so intrinsic to the show."

Asked to offer up some storylines for season two, Katz rattles



Speak softly and carry a *really* big gun. That's what Benson does when she goes up against the truly *super*natural.

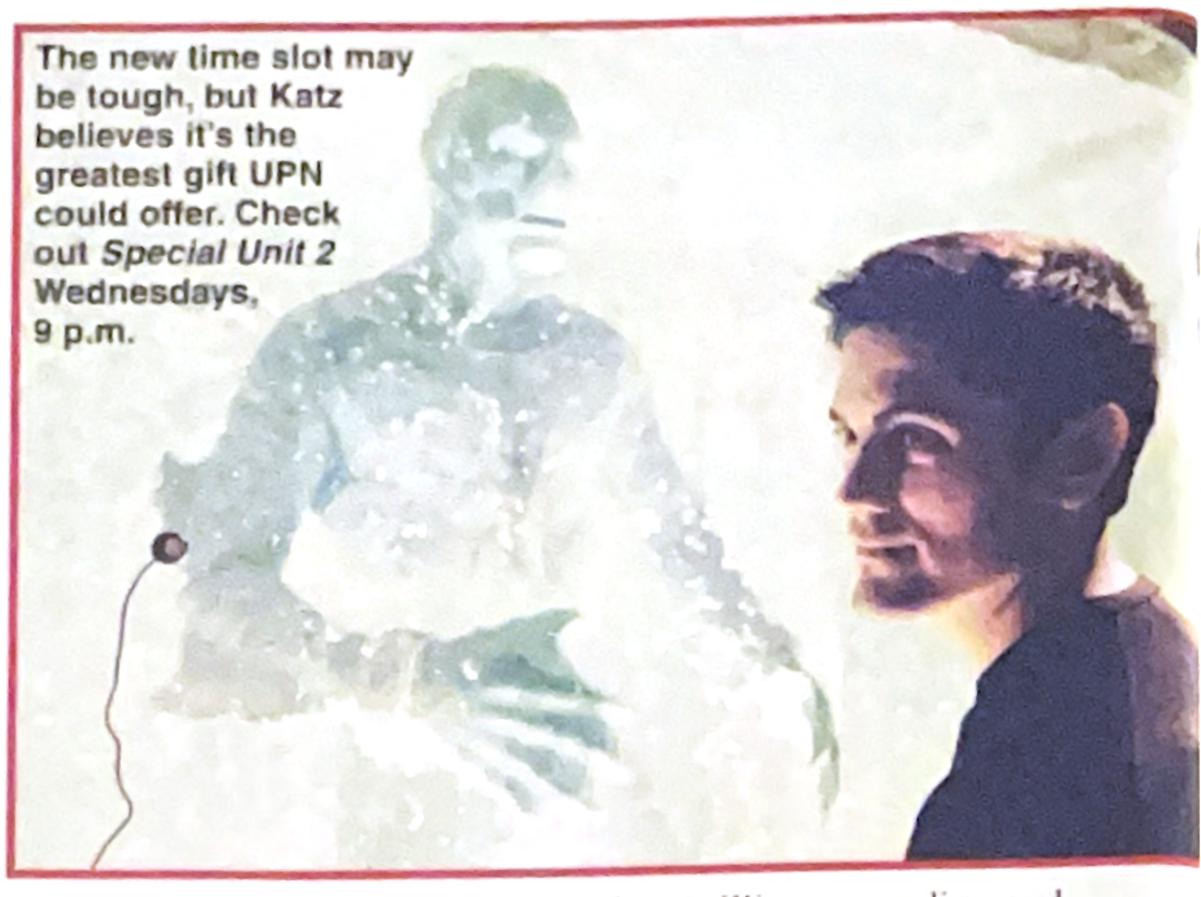
off a few choice revelations. "A witch [Lola Guardini] who sucks years out of you. A chameleon killer [Mark Sheppard] who reaches into your mind and takes the shape of anyone from your memory. A sandman that slips into you when you're sleeping and forces you to act out your repressed urges. It operates through the people it inhabits, so you don't actually get too many good looks at it." And then there are also episodes with a dragon and Medusa to keep the thrill level at a peak.

Human Resources

This assembly of assorted creatures requires equally worthy opponents, and Landes has just what it takes. "Michael really captures the voice of the character. He and I have the same exact sense of humor. He's a good actor, likable, good-looking and has a great sense of humor," Katz says.

As Detective Benson, Lee "really pulls off the difficult chore of being likable and accessible, and yet she still manages to kind of sit on Nick," he assesses. "You don't want a character who's always like, 'Don't do that!' The key to her interaction with Nick is that she's his censor: The more grounded she is, the more he can get away with."

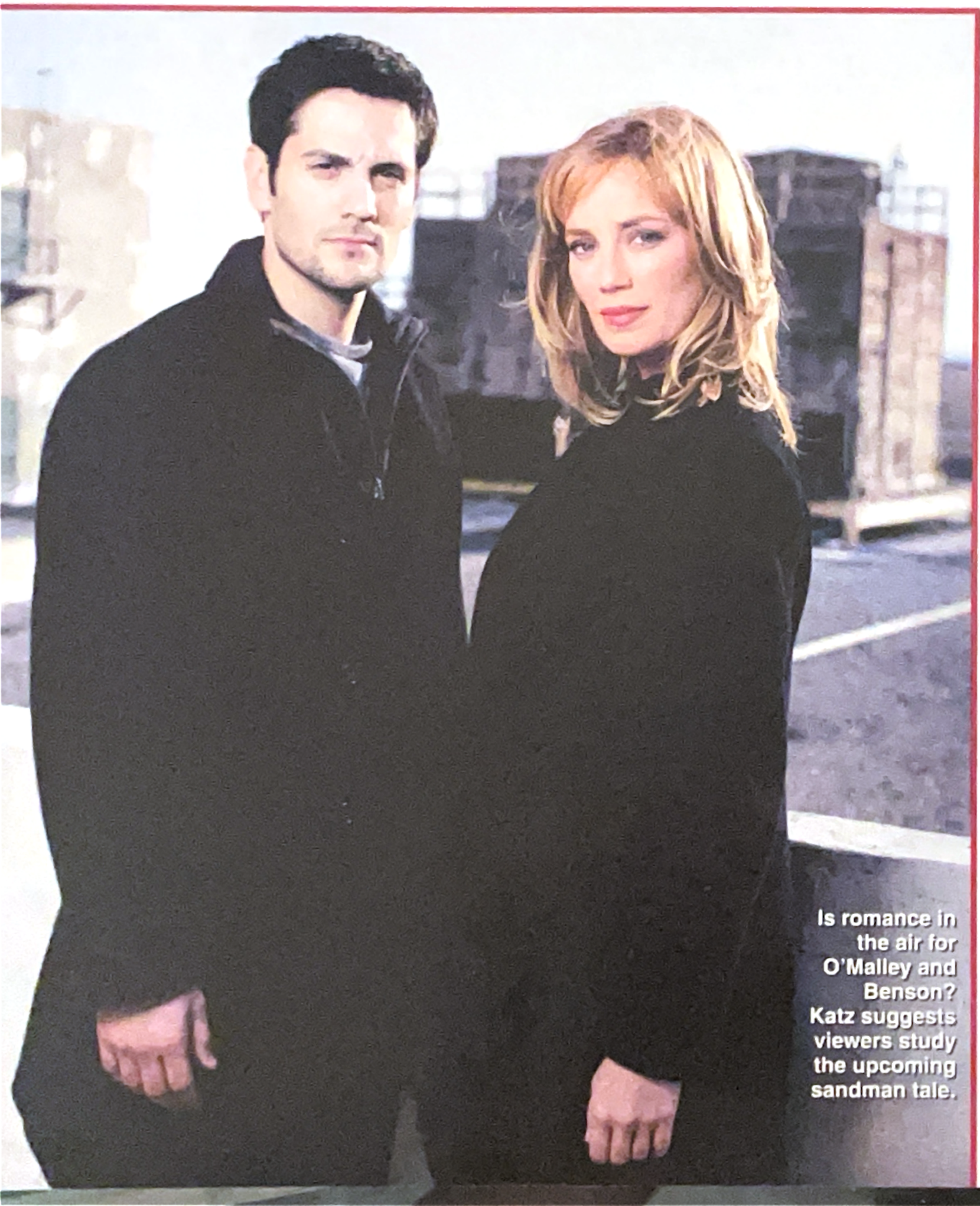
Those viewers who wonder whether this relationship will turn into romance will have to wait and see, says Katz. "There will be some surprises," he promises, "particularly in the sandman episode."



The new time slot may be tough, but Katz believes it's the greatest gift UPN could offer. Check out *Special Unit 2* Wednesdays, 9 p.m.

Danny Woodburn, who plays Carl the Gnome, will keep his high profile this season. "I saw him on *Seinfeld* and said, 'That's my guy!' Danny's a brilliant comedian and comic actor and he has a tremendous dignity, which is critical for the character to get away with what he gets away with. Many people have been really eager for another Nick-Carl fistfight, but I'm debating whether or not to go there."

"The thrust of the second season is going to be more on character, more on developing a mythology."



Is romance in the air for O'Malley and Benson? Katz suggests viewers study the upcoming sandman tale.

One thing Katz isn't worried about are complaints about excessive dwarf abuse. "Carl *always* wins, if you've noticed," Katz points out. "That's one of the keys to our getting away with it: He always gets the last shot in or the last remark, the last word. We protect him that way."

The relationship between Carl and Nick, which "started very violent and became very brotherly," will be greatly determined this season by the rapport of the actors themselves. In other words, how Landes and Woodburn interact off-camera influences their roles in front of it. How's that for added realism?

Katz will be aided and abetted this season by writer Jack (*Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*) Bernstein and such veteran TV directors as *Buffy*'s John T. Kretchmer and Oscar L. (TV's *The Net*) Costo, as well as newcomer David (*Angel*) Straiton. Their joint efforts will be needed to conquer the show's tough Wednesday, 9 p.m. time slot. But Katz isn't worried: "It's a really good spot, after *Enterprise*. It's as great a gift as UPN is going to be able to give me."

Ironically, *Special Unit 2* is basically taking the place of *Seven Days*, a series with which Katz was briefly involved. "I only did a couple of episodes of that show, and I had a very nice time. I'm sorry it's no longer on the air, and I think people will miss it."

And for those viewers out there who previously missed out on *Special Unit 2* the first time around, they now have a chance to catch up with what Evan Katz terms "the scariest funny show on television." ★

Design & Layout: Heiner Feil

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ALIEN

All's well at *Roswell* now that Jason Katims has

What's new this year on *Roswell*? Adam Rodriguez (far left) joins the cast as Jesse Ramirez, a love interest for Isabel (Katherine Heigl, in green top).

ATION YEAR

a new network to call home.

By BILL WARREN

It's interesting that Jason Katims' first work as a writer was on *My So-Called Life*, because while, at first glance, that show seems light years apart from his current TV series *Roswell*, the two are actually quite similar. Both deal with teen angst, adolescents and alienation—but with *Roswell*, that alienation is a little more literal.

After two seasons on the WB, *Roswell* has moved to UPN, in a time slot (Tuesdays, 9 p.m.) right after the similarly shifting *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* beginning October 9. Katims (the show's executive producer) is well aware that this season could be make-or-break time for *Roswell*, and though it has dedicated fans, the series has never been a smashing success. So Katims is devoting a great deal of attention to changing *Roswell*—changes he hopes are improvements.

"The direction we want to go in began with the final episodes of last season," he explains, "which were all built on stories with universal themes, and were easily relatable. That's where I feel the show is at its best, and so that's how we're building the episodes for this season. We're really basing them on character arcs. The theme for me is change."

The Outsiders

Katims realizes, though, that he can't stray too far from what originally attracted viewers to *Roswell*. "Many of the people's responses were about the characters all being outsiders," he notes. "Even in the pilot, the Sheriff character, who at that time was just an antagonist, was on the outside of society.

"I think that because these characters are all sort of underdogs outside the mainstream, that has really provided the way in for our audience. It was a complete surprise to me in the first season when I found out about this fan base that's just so dedicated to the show."

The executive producer keeps an eye on these enthusiasts by checking out fan discussions on the Internet. "My standard joke is that if I want to know what's going on with the show, I go to the Crashdown site [www.crashdown.com]

All Roswell Photos: Copyright 2001 UPN

and find out. They seem to always know things before I do.

"I have a responsibility to try to do whatever I can to make sure we wind up in a good space," Katims says about the channel change. "I knew there was a possibility at UPN somewhat ahead of the game, that there was interest there. So I met with [network head] Dean Valentine and everybody at UPN and expressed what I wanted to do if the WB didn't pick up the show."

The natural question that now arises is: Will *Roswell* cross over with any other UPN shows? "I would be open to that," Katims notes slyly. And, in fact, it *is* happening. In "Secrets & Lies," Max (Jason Behr) will visit Los Angeles and audition—ironically, to play an alien—for *Enterprise*. He'll share a scene with *Roswell* producer/*Trek* veteran Jonathan Frakes, who is, in this fictional scenario, directing an episode of *Enterprise* and, in reality, actually directing *Roswell*'s "Secrets & Lies."

"You don't need to be an SF buff to enjoy the show."

Katims wasn't so open to some of the WB's ideas, though. And one reason he was happy with the move to a new network was that the WB "was pushing us more toward mythology plots. They wanted to keep those going in three- or four-episode arcs. [But I wanted to do shows] more based on human emotion, more based on character-driven storylines than on mythology.

"We're trying to do stand-alone episodes where, essentially, you don't have to see the previous episode or the next one to feel like you've seen the story," he reports. "But we definitely are continuing with character arcs, and building everything out of our characters—like Max's quest to find his son, Isabel's relationship and how far and fast that goes, Michael getting a job and Liz being forbidden by her family to see Max."

Katims evidently wasn't satisfied with the second season's emphasis on action and science fiction elements (or perhaps he's aware that the Internet chatterers somewhat frowned on it). "There will still continue to be an action quotient in the show, and there will definitely be a science fiction quotient, but I'm trying to build on something that's very relatable. You don't need to be an SF buff to enjoy the show."

Of course, he can't get around the fact that three of his lead characters *are* aliens. "Nor do you want to," Katims argues, "because that's what makes the show special. There's a magical quality to the show because they're aliens. I also think there's a lot of humor to *Roswell*, and those are aspects that have been a bit hidden in the past—and those are things we want to explore more this year."

The Mythmakers

In the second season, alien-friendly human Maria DeLuca (Majandra Delfino) occasionally introduced episodes, providing exposition for those viewers who weren't entirely hip to the *Roswell* jive. "We found that there was a certain level of confusion for some of the audience who weren't catching all the episodes," Katims admits. "We got into some mythology arcs, and we wanted to turn that into a positive. Majandra has a great sense of humor and a great voice, and it was an effective way to make sense of some of the stuff for the audience." Maria's preludes will not be a part of the new season.

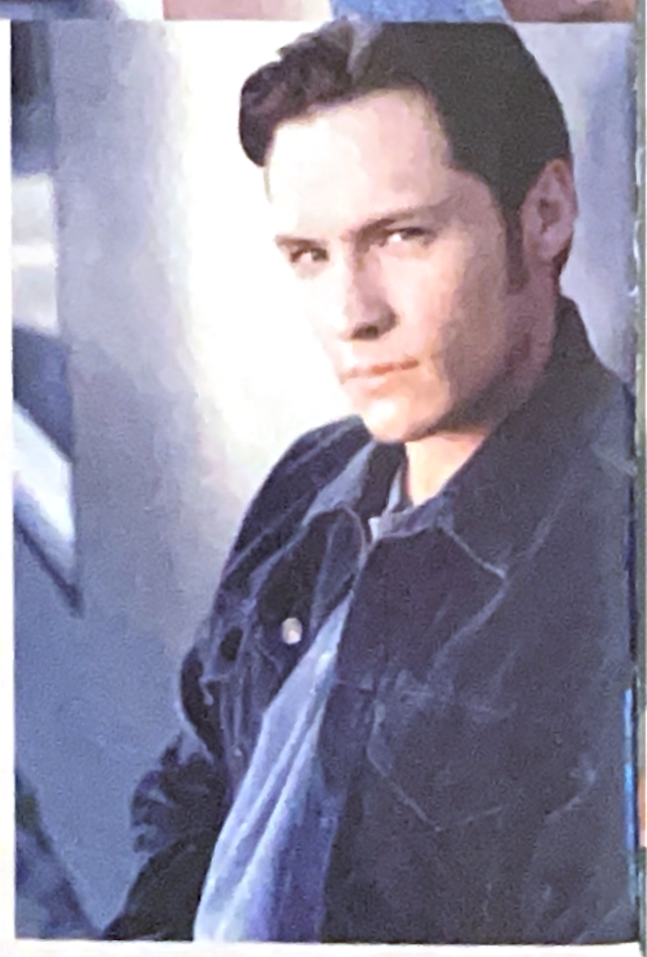
But new aliens will be. The heroes of *Roswell* are not the *only* extraterrestrials on Earth. "We will definitely play with the idea of other aliens out there," he promises, "but we're going to be very selective with that, and have them play roles on a more ongoing basis that will stay consistent throughout the season. I'm most interested in watching these characters—and not only the aliens, but the humans—trying to get along here and live their lives, with that twist *Roswell* offers. It lifts the show to the level of metaphor."

This season, a haunted Max (Jason Behr) pursues a heartbreaking quest. He's in search of his missing child.

Maria (Majandra Delfino) will be exploring her musical talents further, but her offbeat episode-opening "chalk talks" have been scratched.

Despite its fantastic concept, *Roswell* is set in a very real place—Roswell, New Mexico—and is based on a series of novels by Melinda Metz. Katims was also influenced by the fabled extraterrestrial events that occurred at Roswell in 1947.

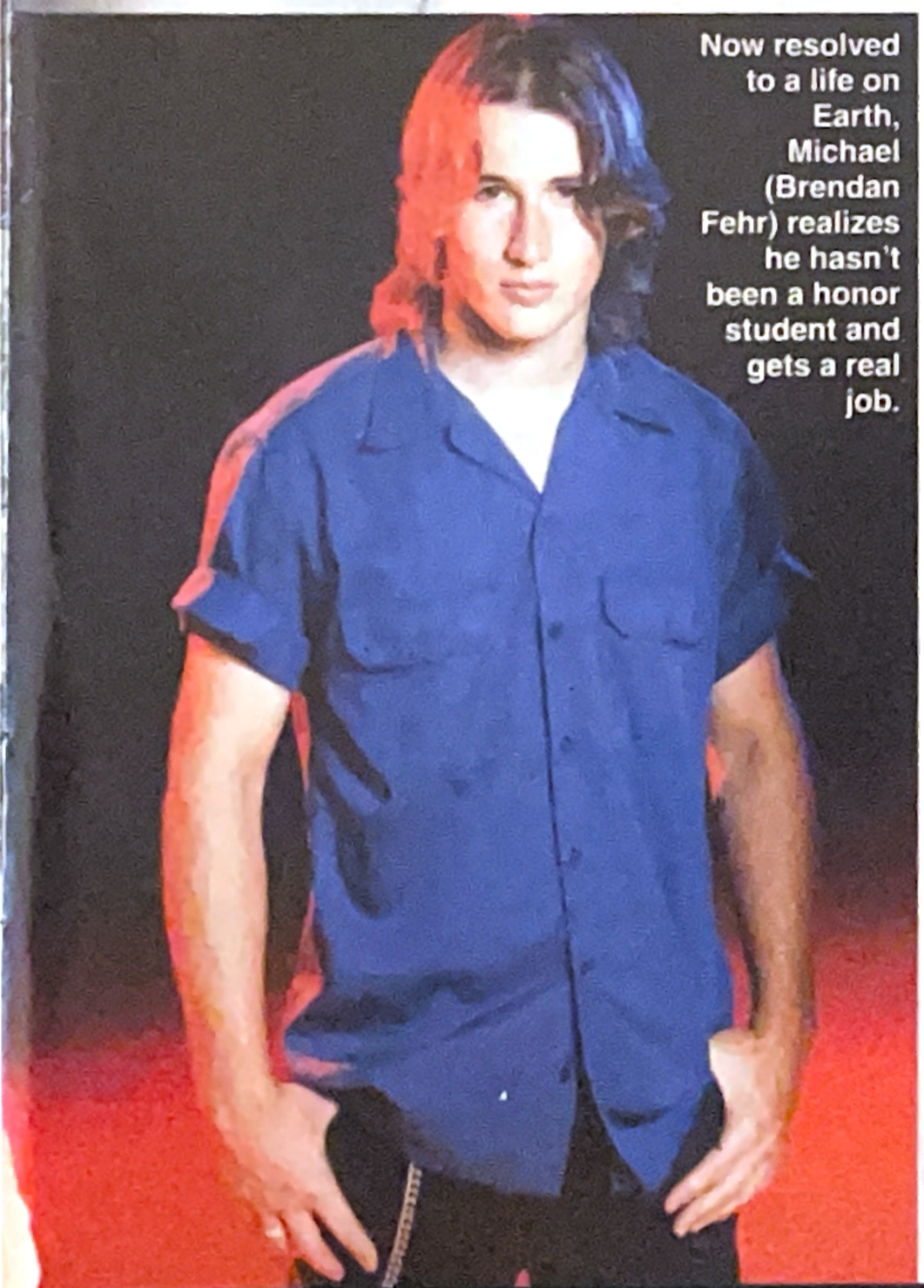
"Before I wrote the pilot," he notes, "I went to Roswell, spent a couple of days there and got myself enmeshed in the myth and the history of what happened. It really does inform the show sometimes, in creating our own versions of things that happened, but it's essentially just the same kind of research you would do as a writer about anything. Using what supposedly happened helps us build story. Also, we did an episode last year where the show went back to 1947, and we sort of



Like his Sheriff father, Kyle (Nick Wechsler) has grown in surprising ways. For example, he's a Buddhist.

Liz's (Shiri Appleby) love for Max becomes a forbidden one. Her parents no longer want her seeing the alienated youth.

The death of Alex (Colin Hanks) continues to reverberate. Life isn't so funny in *Roswell* anymore.



Now resolved to a life on Earth, Michael (Brendan Fehr) realizes he hasn't been a honor student and gets a real job.

Photo: Copyright 2000 The WB

combined the myth of what happened in Roswell with the mythology we've created ourselves."

The pilot was based closely on Metz's novel *Roswell High*. She followed with a series of further books, but the show didn't use them as source material. After the first one, Katims says, "we sort of went on divergent paths into two parallel universes."

In fact, there's now a competing series of *Roswell* paperback novels which adhere to the TV show's scenario. And Metz and her writing partner (and *Roswell High* book editor) Laura Byrnes are penning episodes for the TV series itself, but they'll be following the TV format. "At this point," Katims observes, "the show is the show. But we're looking to her and her partner to bring their wonderful imaginations to the show." *Star Trek*'s Ronald D. Moore is also coming back to write more episodes.

Katims' clarity about *Roswell*'s future doesn't mean he'll be disclosing many details about the new season. He does remark that "at the final episode last year, the alien characters who all thought being on Earth was a temporary situation learned it's permanent. Now they have to build lives for themselves here. That's [one of the main stories] we want to explore in this coming season."

"We can't just get out of any jam because we have some aliens on the show."

The Lovers

As fans know, two series regulars departed the Roswell scene near season's end. Alex (Colin Hanks) was killed off (allowing Hanks to go make movies). His enigmatic death was eventually revealed to have been prompted by the alien Tess (Emilie de Ravin). The lovely, if duplicitous, Tess then fled Roswell, pregnant with alien prince Max's child.

So, naturally, this season, "Max goes on a quest to find his child and Liz [Shiri Appleby] goes along with him, and that quest takes them out of Roswell and onto the road," Katims reveals. "We're also adding one character, a love interest for Isabel [Katherine Heigl]. We've had the opportunity to see Liz and Max and Michael and Maria—to watch those relationships flourish and sort of fall apart. It's time for Isabel to have a similar situation."

Last season ended with Isabel heading for college. However, Katims clarifies, "She's *not* going off to college. She's going to stay at a community college, largely because of this relationship that she has formed over the season [with Adam Rodriguez as Jesse Ramirez]. It's a coming-of-age for Isabel, as well as for many of the other characters. We want to expand the canvas of the show, with each of the characters going in a different direction. The stories are getting a little bit out of high school.

"Isabel gets into a serious relationship and falls into a precipitous marriage. Michael [Brendan Fehr] recognizes that he has spent no time investing himself in life on Earth, and realizes that while he's supposed to be a high school senior, it would take him three years to graduate at this point because he never went to a class. So he wants to build a life for himself, and winds up getting a job. Maria begins to pursue her musical career, and that becomes a real thing."

William Sadler will return as Sheriff Valenti. "He started as just a bad guy," Katims observes. "But he had so much more to offer that he sort of became a friend and surrogate father to these kids in certain ways. We want to continue that, and definitely continue to explore Kyle's character [Valenti's son, played by Nick Wechsler] beyond Buddhism.

"One of the things I'm really interested in playing, starting with the beginning of the year, is the family drama that's inherent in the show, but which we've never really explored. In [this season's] first episode, Max and Liz get arrested away from Roswell, so they can't simply make a call to the Sheriff or the deputy and fix it. Suddenly, they're in *real* trouble, and their parents are called in. The parents start to have questions about what their kids are involved in, and it's not so funny anymore. It's not like the kids can now go away for two days and say, 'We went camping.'

"By the end of that episode," he continues, "Liz is forbidden by her parents to ever see Max. What we're building by starting off that way are stories about these kids in the context of their parents. These kids are starting to realize that their parents are human beings and what they do affects them. There is so much material to explore by bringing the parents closer in and using them in more episodes."

Alex's death was one of the elements that led Katims to reconsider just how SF-oriented he wanted *Roswell* to be. "With the final arc of last season, beginning with the episode where Alex dies," Jason Katims says, "I felt the show got to another level. Suddenly, it wasn't so easy for everybody—one of our own was killed. It wasn't so funny anymore. We can't just get out of any jam because we have some aliens on the show. I really liked that. I think those are really good stories for the cast to play, because they give them something to sink their teeth into. That's more in the direction of where I want *Roswell* to go." ★

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Dreaming of Africa, the jungle's shapeliest shapeshifter steams up the screen anew.

Suddenly Sheena

By JOE NAZZARO

There has been a considerable amount of casualties in the heroine-action genre these last few months. Xena is gone, Cleopatra and pals are kaput and the Queen has hung up her Swords.

But fans of *Sheena* need not despair. Gena Lee Nolin's sexy shapeshifter is returning for a second syndicated season of jungle adventures, and according to series co-creator/executive producer Steve Sears, you ain't seen nuthin' yet.

"The show's look has really gotten better as far as action and special FX go," claims Sears, who honed his skills in the heroine trade working on *Xena: Warrior Princess*. "So have the characterizations, because we're starting to dwell more on our characters' backgrounds and their interactions."

Sears is feeling fatigued at the moment, as he oversees post-production on the first 13 episodes of *Sheena*'s second season from the show's production base in Orlando, Florida. The reason for his fatigue is obvious: The cast and crew continued shooting from last season right into this one *without* a break.

"I had always planned to try and shoot the show more on the schedule we had with *Xena*," he explains, citing his previous series, because the summer in Orlando is almost unbearable. "I figured we would take a break during the summer months, so we shot 35 episodes in a row. The actors' strike wasn't going to bother us, because they would have been striking in July and we would have been on hiatus, but the writers' strike [targeted for an earlier date] was a concern. We had to get those scripts moving, and despite that, the studio and everybody involved agrees that these first 13 second season shows are our best episodes. They turned out really well, but I have to say, some of those scripts were done under quite a bit of duress because we had to get them completed quickly."

The show's second season brings an old jungle hand to *Sheena* country when ex-Tarzan Ron Ely guests in "The Feral King."

Savage Jungle

Things might have gotten a bit hectic on the *Sheena* set by episode 35, but Sears credits Nolin and co-star John Allen Nelson (who plays Matt Cutter) with keeping morale high. "Gena has impressed everybody," he declares. "Guest stars show up here, and they say we have the nicest people. It almost gets annoying sometimes, but everybody walks away saying Gena is somebody who hasn't let this go to her head. If we're shooting in the Disney park and she happens to see a little girl or boy watching us, she'll walk over and start talking to the parents.

Gena Lee Nolin continues to enchant audiences as the amazingly innocent yet supremely sultry Sheena.

Wild Adventures

With the first half of *Sheena*'s second season completed, Steve Sears offers a preview of things to come. "This season, I wanted to do a sports episode," he mentions, "so we put together a story about a young African girl who wanted to be a boxer when she grew up and modeled herself around Robert Wangila, the first African to win an Olympic gold medal for boxing.

"We had to find an actress who could box, and the name Laila Ali came up, Muhammad Ali's daughter. We got in touch and I enclosed a synopsis of the story, and it turns out her husband is also a boxer, and he used to spar with Robert Wangila. They read the story and she said, 'I want to do it!' It's an exciting episode that has boxing footage, our usual Sheena action and this whole topspin of Robert Wangila. We even put Laila's husband in the episode: He plays a bad guy, and she gets to beat him up!

" 'The Feral King' was written by Missy Good [who wrote several scripts for *Xena*'s final season]. It's our version of the Tarzan story," he explains. "I thought, 'What if Sheena found Tarzan? Let's say he was 19 or 20 years old, and she finds this feral kid living in the jungle.' As we were putting it together, somebody made a joke about Ron Ely—who played Tarzan in the '60s—being the perfect bad guy. We all laughed, but when the laughter died down, we looked at each other and said, 'Hmmm.' He came out and played the villain, and everyone fell in love with him. There's even a line where he says something like, 'This guy is no Tarzan. Take my word for it!'

" 'Stranded in the Jungle' is about five people who parachute into a remote jungle," he outlines, "with $5 million on the line. The first one who gets out of the jungle and reports in wins the money, but when they get there, a civil war breaks out in the country, and Cutter ends up being involved. Guest star Gary Graham from *Alien Nation* [the TV series] plays an important link to Sheena's past. One of the things we're going to explore is how Sheena has several gaps in who she is, and we're slowly trying to peel that away. I can't give away the details, but I'm hoping it will lead up to a very special guest star later on.

" 'Treasure of the Sienna Mende' is a caper story. I've kind of created our own little Autolycus, played by Alexandra Tydings. The villain of the piece is [*Babylon 5*'s] Mira Furlan. The director is Mira's husband, Goran Gajic.

" 'Rendezvous' has a very significant romantic component for Sheena. There's the obvious sexual tension between her and Cutter," Sears notes, "but somebody else gets thrown into the mix, and he's played by Peter Reckell, Bo Brady on *Days of Our Lives*. Peter and I used to spar together in the same martial arts class, and have kept in touch ever since. It's an episode you think would create a wedge between Sheena and Cutter, but by the end, you realize it has done the opposite.

"I wrote 'The Darkness,' which is about a creature that's killing people, and the villagers believe it has been summoned up by a shaman. They think Kali brought this creature, but in fact, the bad person responsible is played by [*Babylon 5*'s] Patricia Tallman. There are several times this season where Kali must go up against people, and in this one, I tried to set up the possibility of a character who might come back later on to haunt her—and Pat was perfect for it.

"In our first 22 episodes," Steve Sears points out, "we concentrated on the action and CGI to try and get viewers. In our second season, we've kept the level of action, CGI and animal-morphing up there, but at the same time, we're looking at who these characters are and what makes them tick."

—Joe Nazzaro

There's a "Meltdown in Maltaka" when boxer Laila Ali fights her way onto *Sheena* (airing the week of November 3).

This syndicated Queen of the Jungle is based on an American pop culture icon, the comic book heroine created by Will Eisner and S.M. Iger.

And it's not like the star going over to get the picture taken; she'll just start chatting, and she's like that with everybody on the crew. The cool thing about it, on top of what it does to the public when they see her, is how the crew reacts to her, because they'll do everything they can for her."

He has similar praise for Nolin's co-star. "I had wanted John from the time we did our original presentation. John was in that presentation, and then we did an entire casting search where we looked at everybody in Hollywood, because he hadn't quite convinced some of the Sony executives. When it finally came down to it, they said, 'John is the guy,' so we brought him in and it has been a wonderful relationship. He has known Gena for a long time, because he was on *Baywatch* at one point, so it's a good camaraderie we have here. Everybody has fun, we spend a lot of time laughing and we still get the footage."

Getting that footage at a reasonable price was a basic priority for the production team. Shooting a weekly jungle adventure series isn't cheap, particularly when you add in some expensive visual FX, the occasional prosthetic makeup and a few hundred animals of varying shapes and sizes.

Enter series co-creator/executive producer Douglas Schwartz, who had worked on *Baywatch* as well—and in the same capacity. Schwartz knew part of the solution was bringing the production to Florida, where they would get more bang for their buck.

"I had produced *Thunder in Paradise* here in 1994-95," he says, referring to the syndicated Hulk Hogan series. "In fact, I'm sitting here at the same desk, in the same office, shooting on the same stage in the same studio in the same locations, so I know this place very well. I was the only person who thought to use Disney World as a backlot. By using EPCOT, we get 13 different sets for 13 countries—wetlands, dry lands, they all become part of what we can draw from.

"Then I went to Disney and proposed a deal where they would get the benefit of us

All Sheena Photos: Copyright 2001 Columbia TriStar Television

Soap star Peter Reckell has a "Rendezvous" with Sheena. Mira Furlan, Pat Tallman and Alexandra Tydings also guest this year.

being a live, new show on the air as an attraction at the studio. In exchange, they would allow us to shoot on all 38,000 acres and 44 square miles and give us the soundstage and the production offices. That's what Disney did, and for a minimal charge—they would be embarrassed to tell you how little it is—but that was the *only* way we could produce *Sheena* for under $1 million per hour."

Animal Expense

Schwartz was also able to draw on Florida's extensive talent pool for a fraction of the price it would cost to hire in LA. "On the CGI side," he notes, "there's a talented designer named Art David who worked on *The Matrix*, *Batman* and other big movies. Art has a company in Orlando, and Disney has Disney Ideas right here on the lot.

"As part of the overall deal with Disney, I also negotiated a CGI deal, so our CGI FX are created by the Imagineering people at Disney Ideas right across from our stage, and they do amazing work. Because nobody goes to Florida—all the productions go to LA, where there are 200 FX companies—Disney Ideas wanted an opportunity to show what they could do. For them, it was a win-win situation, because they could show and attract other people to Florida while giving us the benefit of low-cost but extremely high-quality visual FX. It's tough to do CGI every week without a $2 million budget like *Star Trek*, but Disney Ideas allows us to do that.

"On the prosthetic FX, we have Lee Grimes, an extraordinarily talented makeup artist," Schwartz says. "I originally met with Stan Winston, who did all of my prosthetic FX on *Manimal*. Stan and I know each other from the early '80s and keep in touch, and Stan really wanted to do the show, but he was so busy with *Jurassic Park III* and many other things, and the expense was so extremely high, we just couldn't work it out. So we ended up with Lee, who is no second choice, because Lee is very talented. We're very happy with him."

Not surprisingly, for a show set in the jungles of Africa, one of the biggest expenses turned out to be actors of the multi-legged variety. "They're *very* expensive," Schwartz affirms. "For example, we bring in an elephant named Bubbles who's $25,000 a day. She's the most expensive actor we have. Big cats—lions, tigers, leopards, black panthers—range about $10,000 a day. For 'Marabunta,' we even had 200,000 ants with 10 ant wranglers, if you can imagine that.

"The actors would start working, and we would pour buckets containing *thousands* of ants over their heads and bodies and then roll the cameras. They literally had thousands of large ants crawling all over them. It was a *really* difficult show to do, but I guarantee you'll never see that story on any other TV series but *Sheena*. It was a combination of CGI, 200,000 real ants on the set and loads of black rice."

It's difficult to avoid using animals when your main character has the ability to morph into any creature in her line of sight. So far, it's an ability that Sears and his writers have used sparingly. "It *is* expensive," he remarks, "although that's not the reason why we've restricted it. There are creative ways of doing transformations without seeing somebody morph. We did one episode where there's an eagle's shadow on the ground, and just before it hits the ground, the shadow morphs—which is much cheaper—and we still see Sheena come out of it, so there *are* ways around that as far as the budget is concerned.

"The real reason why it's rare is that I *never* wanted this series to be the 'morph show.' It's something Sheena can do, but the rules are very strict. She can't just say, 'I want to be an elephant' and Poof! She's an elephant. There are rules to follow, and she can't stay as an elephant, because the longer she does, the more she's in danger of actually becoming the animal and *remaining* that way. Sheena also knows that she brings back some traits of the animal, because it takes a while to wear off.

"We also introduced the 'Rogue' aspect which are animals that kill for pleasure," he explains. "The people who knew how to morph into animals were called the Kaya, and that's what Kali [Margo Moorer] is, and now Sheena is a Kaya, too. What Kali didn't tell, however, is that if you stay an animal too long and become an animal, you also become a Rogue. So the rules for Sheena's morphing have more texture to them than just saying she can change. It's too easy to get out of danger [that way]—she could just turn into a bird."

Skin Trade

It's easy to accuse *Sheena* of a little gratuitous exploitation when you have a beautiful jungle queen who's often seen in varying states of undress, but Schwartz has a somewhat different interpretation. "I look at it as a *natural* ingredient of the character or the episode you're doing," he defends. "With *Baywatch*, the female lifeguards worked in red, one-piece bathing suits, and the guys were bare-chested and worked in trunks.

Sheena still shapeshifts into other beasts, but with both creativity and budget in mind. Neither renting animals nor morphing FX comes cheap.

Have you noticed? Sheena is a child of nature—and here are the pictures to prove it.

That was their uniform. If you went to a Southern California beach today, the lifeguards there would look *exactly* like the ones on *Baywatch*, so I don't see that as sexploitation.

"It's the same thing with Sheena, who wears a practical outfit made of different animal skins. She blends into that jungle world, so I don't believe that's exploitative. I point to the pilot, where she first meets Matt Cutter. She's in the bushes and has just finished being the Darak'Na, and she's covered in mud and needs to wash it off, so she asks if she can borrow his waterfall. He says, 'Sure, go ahead,' and turns his back while she's bathing the mud off. He then turns around and she does not understand why he's looking at her like that, and we cut to his face, and he's flabbergasted that this gorgeous, knockout blonde is standing there, staring at him, naked. Well, that serves the characters and their relationship, and that's what makes them different. She's not shy, because she lives with the animals and it's a natural part of her world to be naked. Matt has never known a woman like this, so that's how we set up the relationship."

Adds Sears: "Are there moments in *Sheena* where we say, 'Hey, they could have this conversation in a hot tub?' Yes, quite definitely. As the series goes on, you'll certainly see moments that are hard to get into other series, because we show a little more bare back and some more suggestive shots.

"The cool thing about Sheena is that she is a child of nature. Sheena doesn't care because she doesn't know why it's wrong. Xena had the same attitude—she could kick anybody's butt. So there will be scenes where Cutter shows up at Sheena's lair, and while he's talking to her, she'll stand up out of a pool completely naked. In the early episodes, he certainly reacts to it, but then I wrote a scene where he turns to her and says, 'No, not this time! I'm really too used to this.' Because after a while, it *does* get to be boring."

With the second season of *Sheena* ready to air, its creators hope regular viewers will enjoy the upcoming surprises (see sidebar on page 83), and that new viewers will give the show a chance. "I would tell them to find us," Sears suggests. "And to do that, we have a website [www.sheenatv.com], and there's a station listing there.

"To be honest," Steve Sears admits, "I'm one of those people who doesn't like to hype a show. I prefer to work on an undiscovered wonder that suddenly breaks through. I would tell viewers to come to this show without any expectations, except to have a good time—have fun with the characters, and any time you think we're about to push that BS meter, chances are, one of our characters will point it out before you do. We're just having some fun with it."

"I believe that *Sheena* is a standout series," Douglas Schwartz declares, "and I say that not because I co-created and executive-produce it, but because I *watch* it. I hear comments from people all the time, people who are really surprised because everyone thought *Sheena* was going to be Tarzan with breasts and that's it. Both Steve and I wanted to do a show that was richer in culture and relationships, and blend it with the ingredients of action-adventure, and I really believe we've accomplished that." ★

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The Next Stage of EVOLUTION

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

It was supposed to be huge. Director Ivan Reitman's SF comedy *Evolution* was preordained as a summer box-office blockbuster. DreamWorks SKG fully expected to see people strolling around in three-eyed smiley-face T-shirts the way that audiences sported *Ghostbusters* apparel in the '80s. With David Duchovny spoofing his *X-Files* career and Julianne Moore tripping over her august art-house image by joining *MAD TV*'s Orlando Jones and *American Pie*'s Seann William Scott to thwart an evolving special FX-laden alien menace, how could it miss?

Nonetheless, it did, but *Evolution* did not die. Like the movie's creatures, it has survived and mutated—into the animated series *Alienators: The Evolution Continues*, premiering September 15 on Fox Kids. (It's not being called *Evolution* due to the Kids' WB's similarly titled *X-Men: Evolution*.) *Alienators* airs 11:30 a.m. Saturday mornings.

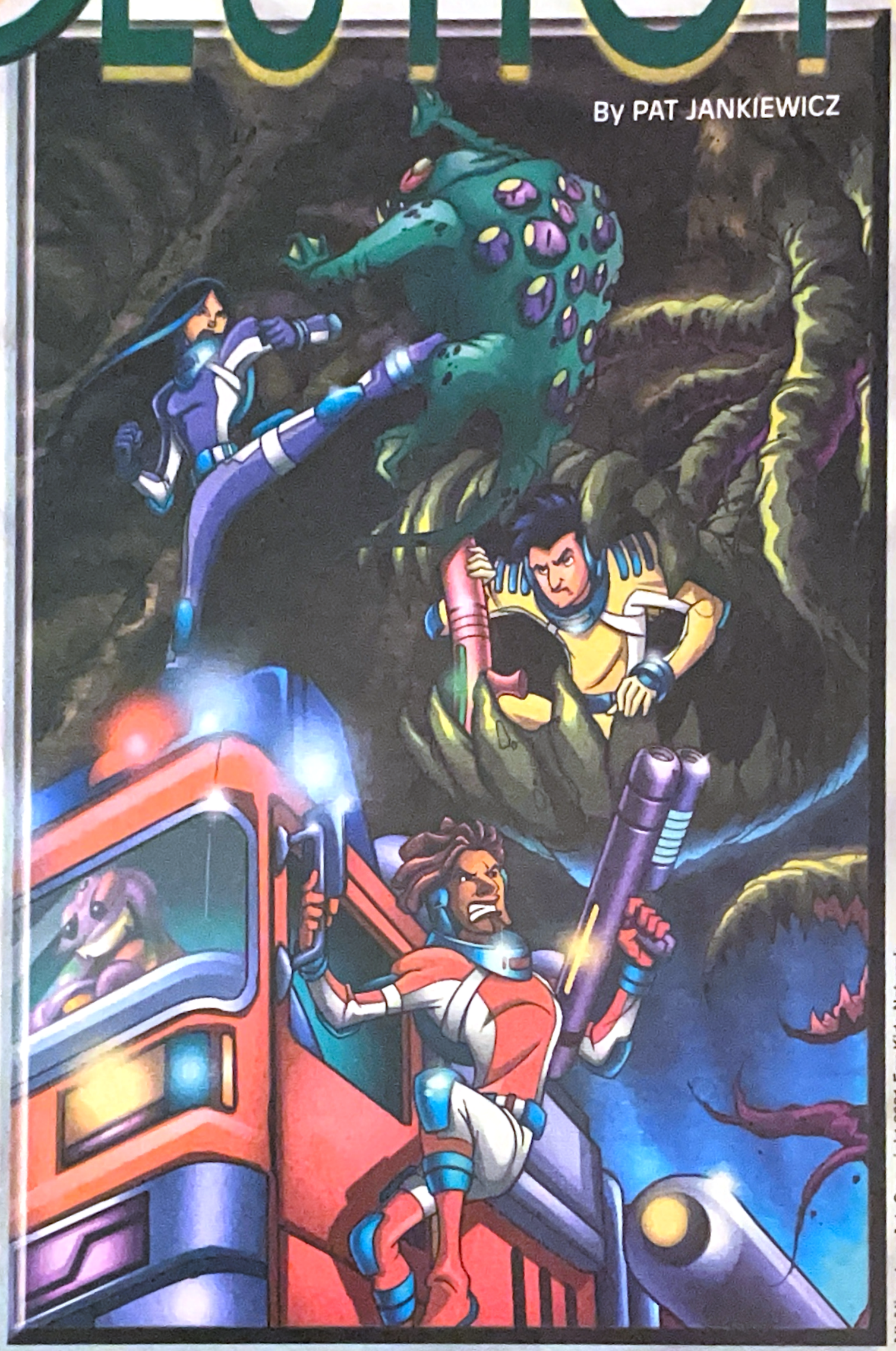
"The show is its own thing. You don't *need* to have seen the movie, but if you're a fan of the movie, you'll see new stuff," says James Bates, Fox Kids' director of programming and development. "Of course, it's based on Reitman's movie, and while that didn't meet some people's box-office expectations, the movie tracked very well with children ages 2-11, and that's my bread and butter.

"At Fox Kids, we've always been a boys' network. We would love to have as many girls watching as possible, but we are *Spider-Man*, *Godzilla* and *Power Rangers*. We're for kids who like action and want to see things blow up. That's what our network is, and this new series based on *Evolution* fits in well."

Character Evolutions

In the Saban/Fox Kids building, which towers over Southern California's sprawling Westwood and UCLA campus, Bates sits in his office, which features tiki heads, *X-Files* action figures and a framed poster of the cult classic *The Wicker Man*. *The Dirty Dozen* plays on his TV with the sound off.

Bates, a cheerful, charismatic guy with a neatly trimmed goatee, has revamped and reconfigured Reitman's summer comedy into an action-adventure animated series, downplaying (but not completely eliminating) the movie's obsession with bodily functions. "It picks up a little bit after the movie, with the characters slightly altered to fit Saturday morning: not as many ass jokes, but we do have some gas jokes.



All Alienators Art: Copyright 2001 Fox Kids Network

Meet Fox Kids' animated *Alienators*: newcomer Lucy Mai and—somewhat altered from their live-action *Evolution* egos—Ira Kane and Harry Block.

"Our show opens up things much more than the movie did. You still have a team of guys who react to a threat and go out and bust it," he explains. "The movie was about a ragtag team of people with a little bit of knowledge who find themselves in a situation in one locale. They saved Earth when the U.S. military couldn't. On this show, those characters are now supported by the government as an official team. They're the Alienators, the guys who respond to outbreaks of the Genus—the alien life force from the movie that pops up around the globe.

"Their home base is still Glen Canyon Community College, where the movie took place, but they go all over the world. In the

A movie misfire continues to evolve—into the animated *Alienators*.

film, there was this weird, constantly evolving threat, but we can't have them spending 26 episodes fighting something that just evolves, evolves, evolves. We put a face to the alien menace, a character called Scopes. It wants to take over the planet. We also have dinosaur-looking characters and apes—a little like the ones from the movie.

"*Alienators* is a good SF show. It's the type of show we need to bring back to Saturday morning," he remarks. "We have too many similar shows, all based on games. *Alienators* is almost fresh, because it's so retro, and very similar to the stuff done in the '80s: a team of heroes fighting the enemy to save the world.

"We keep the movie's team of Ira Kane [Duchovny in the film], Dr. Harry Block [Jones] and Wayne [Scott]. We altered Harry. He's still funny, but we beef him up into an action hero. He's still focused on odd sports, though. Wayne is pretty much the same, except he's a much more Saturday-morning version of that character, and played younger than in the movie. He's the gizmo guy, who fixes their vehicle, a fire truck. He gives it special features and hardware."

Fans of Moore may not be thrilled with the toon take on her character. "Dr. Allison Reed, whom the lovely Ms. Moore played in the film, is really a secondary character in our series," Bates reveals. "We have a new female character come on to the team. When we were developing the series, we noticed that Dr. Reed and Ira Kane are both brainy scientists, and we don't need *two* of the same character. Dr. Reed works for the government and calls the team in to handle outbreaks in Africa and other places. Team Alienators is still overseen by the gruff General Woodman, the same character from the feature. He sends in Lieutenant Lucy Mai to join Harry, Ira and Wayne. She's a 'Blue Beret'—our take on Green Berets—a one-woman military fighting force. She does all the butt-kicking."

The Alienators, of course, also have a mascot. "The *Ghostbusters* cartoon series used Slimer for much of its humor. We have a similar character of great function, this adorable three-eyed bouncy character named 'Gassie.' He's Wayne's best friend and sidekick. Gassie is a creation that Dr. Kane makes from some alien DNA. He wanted to create a bloodhound to signal when the Genus is around. What Dr. Kane didn't anticipate is the way that Gassie signals that—through emissions of gas. If the bad guys are around, our bloodhound starts farting."

Cartoon Evolutions

For *Alienators*, "Our story editor-writer is Mike Ryan, who has done a ton of stuff and is involved with *The Powerpuff Girls*. Will [*Spider-Man Unlimited*] Meugniot carried much of the show, including storyboards."

As for *Evolution* producer-director Reitman's involvement with the toon spin-off, Bates remarks: "Joe Medjuck, one of his key people, looked at everything as it was being developed. This show happened at lightning speed. My assumption is that Joe took it back

"We're for kids who like action and want to see things blow up."

to Reitman's company and made sure that it was something they were all cool with. You've got to remember that this was all happening as they were finishing up the film, so I don't know if they were spending hours and hours worrying about *our* show! I don't think that was their biggest concern, but we had some input from them in creating this series. Once they signed off on everything, they handed the show to us to run with the ball."

Because of the series' budget, "we didn't approach any of the big names from the movie to reprise their roles," he says. "Instead, we used voice actors from Vancouver. We *couldn't* afford the movie's stars, and I'm sure we couldn't schedule them either. This series was a runaway train in production. We only started it in January." (For that same reason, the toon characters don't share the likenesses of the film's actors.)

"I worked on Disney's *Hercules* series," Bates says. "The key to that show was that James Woods agreed to reprise his role from the film, so when people heard Woods was doing it, we got big guest stars: Lisa Kudrow, Heather Locklear, William Shatner. The thing is, that didn't make *any* extra kid watch. No kid watched that show because of Heather Locklear, but it made it fun for *us* to go to the recording sessions. Here at Fox Kids, most of the time we get no-name voice actors from Canada—not superstars,

That's Gassie, the kid-friendly, Slimer-like addition to *Evolution* at center. And who's left? Wayne Green, now much younger at right.

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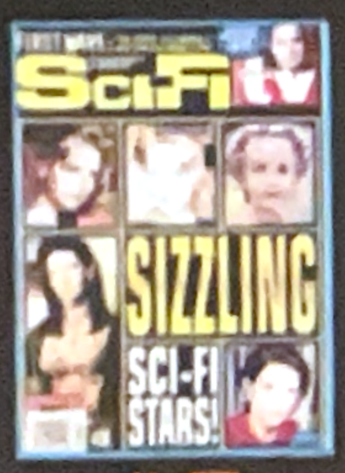

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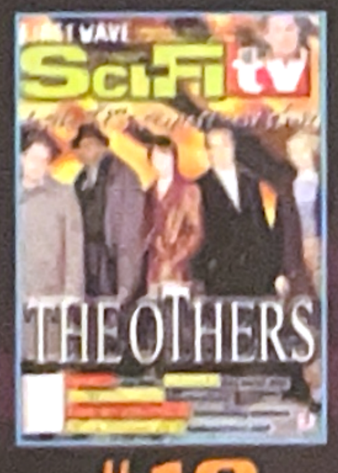

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voiceover talents."

A New Jersey native, Bates' love for SF and animation "came from growing up playing role-playing games. Summers spent in different worlds in the rec room and reading *Creepy* and *Eerie*. They were unusual books. My wife Karen is a production artist at Bongo Comics, and I've written several stories for them."

At Fox Kids, "My job includes quality control, brand-managing and many times, being the great mediator," he details. "You deal with all different entities, like producers, Standards & Practices, writers. I may have a writer plot out a great scene, and the producer or director may do a great job of storyboarding it, but once it's at that stage, Standards & Practices suddenly has a problem with it. We have to make everyone happy, fight for our show and its time slot and bring it home."

> "We can't have them spending 26 episodes fighting something that just evolves, evolves, evolves."

Being the man who develops new properties for the network, Bates is quite excited about two potential projects. "Fox Kids is actively pursuing doing another *Spider-Man* series, this one based on the Sam Raimi movie," Bates reveals, "and I hope to be involved with it. We're also working on an animated *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. It's in the genesis stage; we can't wait for it to start."

However, all is not sunshine and *Power Rangers* for Fox Kids. "Our parent company, Fox Family Worldwide, was bought by Disney. That means the production entity, the Fox Family Channel and Fox Kids International were all bought," he reports. "My little branch, Fox Kids, was *not* purchased, and that's the home of Fox Saturday mornings and weekdays. We're still seeing how the dust settles and trying to look at it as a 'glass half-full' situation. Maybe things will be great and the network will support us so we can launch some big marquee shows, like *Spider-Man* and *Buffy*, but those *won't* be cheap shows.

"As for what's coming up, we aren't sure about the future of Fox Kids. We know we'll belong to Fox, and I believe Fox's attitude may be, 'Oh, wow. Hi, guys. What do *you* do?' But they may say, 'Wow, we could really kick ass with you guys. Let's give you the money to do this, this and this and support you!' Or," James Bates says with a shrug, "it could go the other way."

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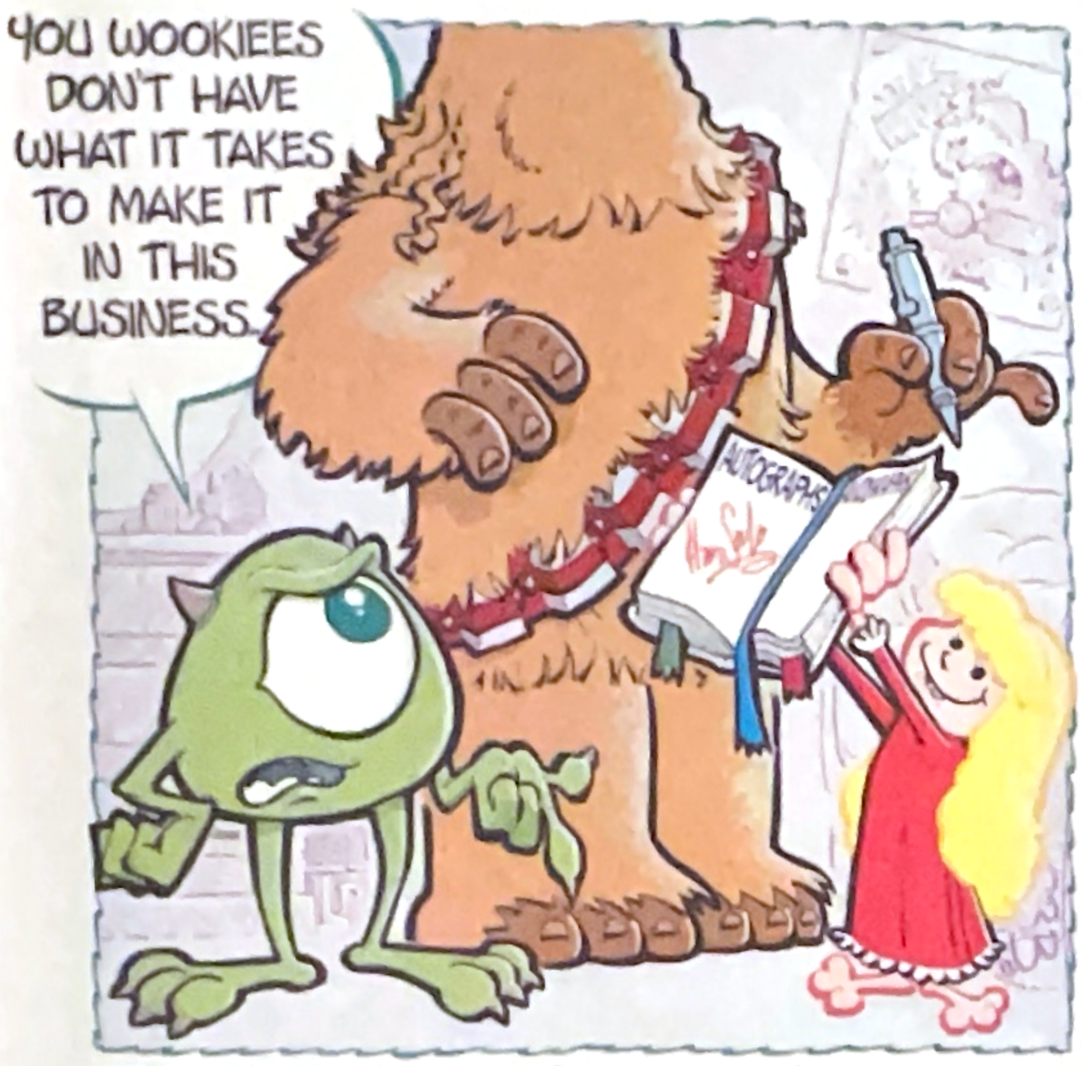
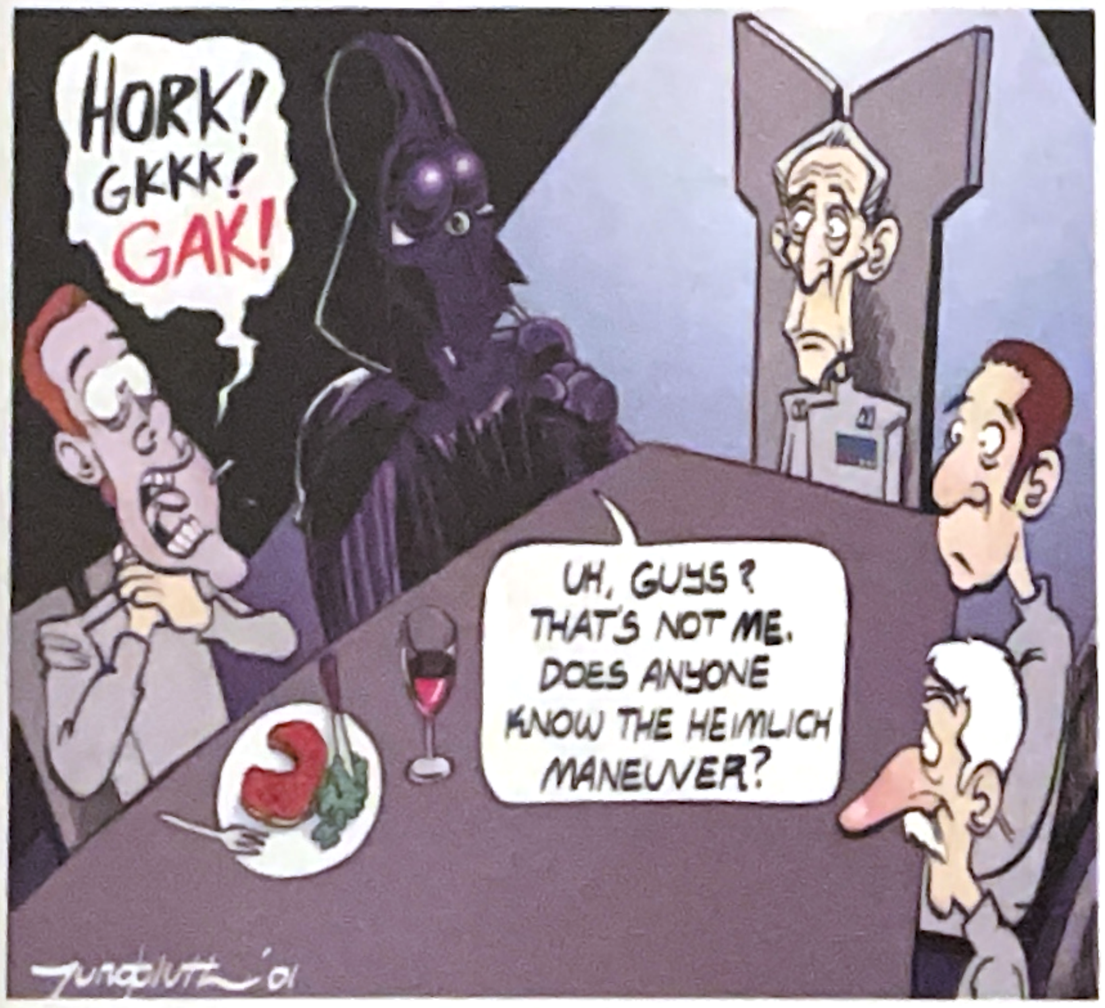


Art: "Big Bad Bubba"

CHEWIE JOINS MONSTERS, INC. AFTER THAT VECTOR PRIME INCIDENT

Art: "Big Bad Bubba"

POOR OL' SULLIVAN JUST HAPPENED TO BE AT THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME



Art: Jason Yungbluth

"WHY DO NEWSPAPERS COVER THE ENTIRE FLOOR OF WATTO'S SHOP, ANAKIN?"

Art: Bob Muleady

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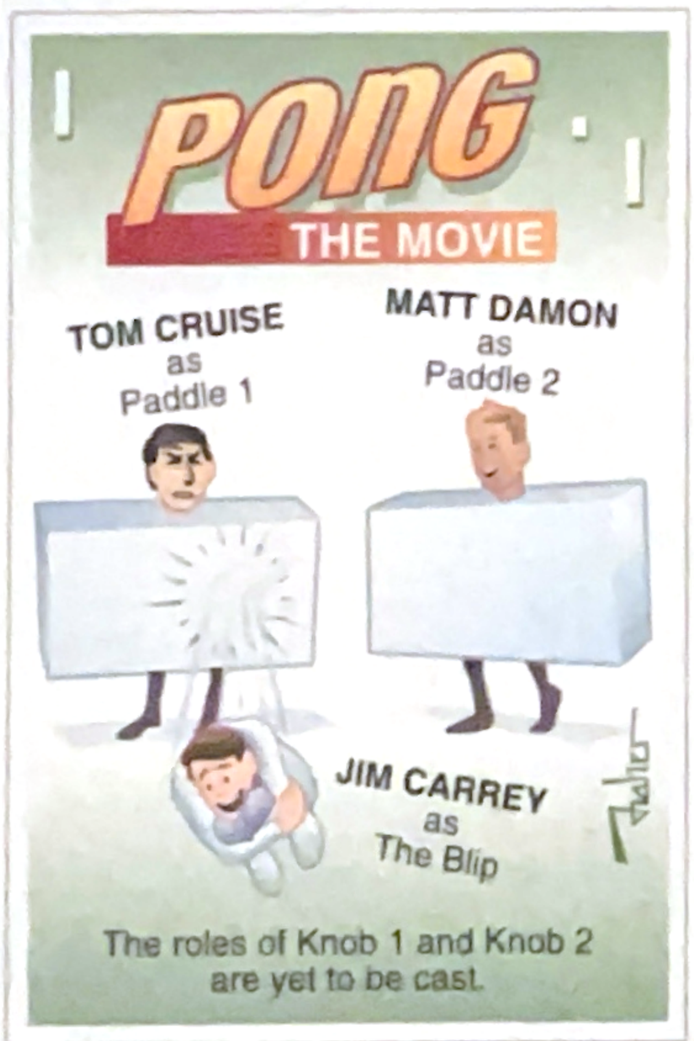
The success of *Tomb Raider* has finally prompted Hollywood to give the green light to a movie version of the granddaddy of **all** video games. It's...



Art: Mike Fisher

LINER NOTES

Well, they killed off Xena a while ago, and I'm still not at all happy about it.

Recalled to Japan in the series finale "Friend in Need" by yet another of those old pals we never heard of before this episode, Xena bravely sacrifices herself in a storm of arrows. Then, for bad measure, her enemies cut off her head and cremate her body—truly overkill. Later, offered a chance to live again at the expense of others, Xena opts to remain contentedly, repentantly dead.

Xena *has* been dead before. She got killed several times in the TV saga, most infamously when she was crucified and ended up a dark angel in Heaven and later a crusading demon in Hell, all before landing a new lease on life. However, in those and other instances, beheading (the *Highlander* way) and cremation were studiously avoided. Her body was saved, so there was something left for her soul to repossess.

Not this time. Things seem pretty final. The TV series is out of production and edging into the eternal twilight of endless rerun. Xena is gone. And it was all planned this way from the very beginning. Or so series producer-co-creator Rob Tapert says. He told STARLOG's Joe Nazzaro (for a forthcoming book): "Let's put it this way: I knew how *Xena* was going to end from the time she was in a three-episode arc on *Hercules*. There was *no question* that Xena was going to die. The only question was, were we going to do a couple of, not theatrical movies, but either direct-to-video or a high-budget TV mini-series? When that didn't come through, Xena's fate was sealed."

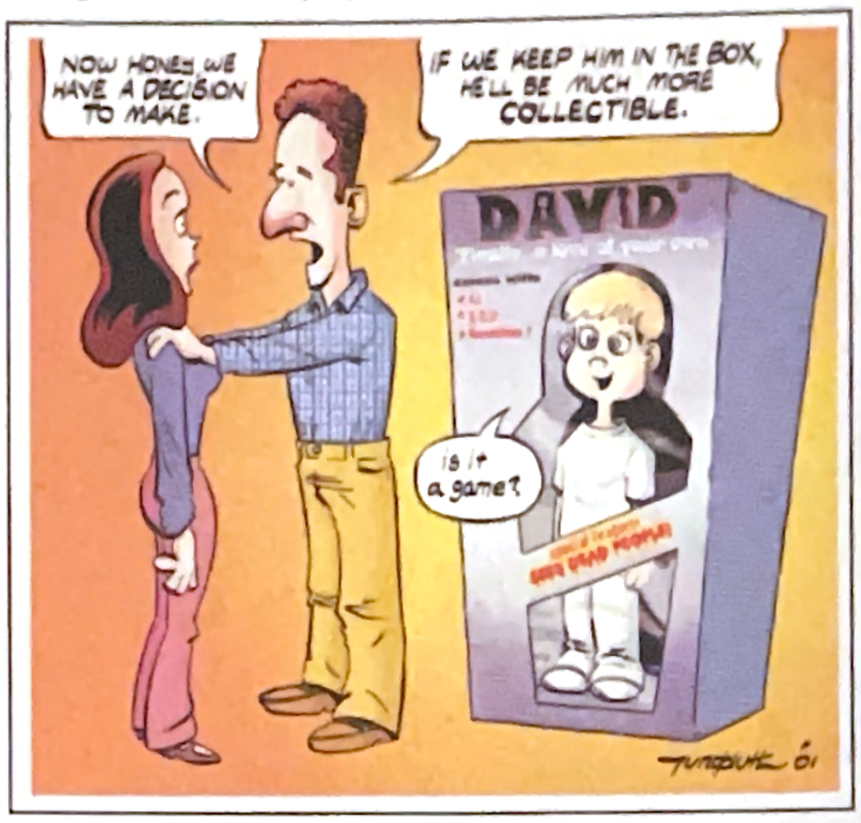
That *doesn't* change how I feel about the subject. Having played Xena for six years, Lucy Lawless, like any other actor, had a certain "investiture" in this heroine's destiny, but she too seems to have agreed to the demise with Tapert (her real-life husband). Time to move on with her life and career (and on to an *X-Files* guest stint).

Neither would I dispute the rights of the creators (Tapert & R.J. Stewart) or copyright holder (Studios USA) to fold, spindle, mutilate, destroy, butcher or slaughter Xena any which way they wish. They "own" the character. She's theirs to kill.

By the way, I *do* know she's a fictional creation. And this is a pop culture arena (SF, fantasy, comics, horror) where "death" is rarely lasting and rebirth commonplace (to wit, Spock, Kirk, Superman, Sherlock Holmes, E.T., etc.). So, given the sure and certainty and hope of resurrection, why should Xena's demise bother me at all?

Nonetheless, it does. If I had been around in the 1890s—and no, I *wasn't*—I would have dispatched an angry e-mail to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle complaining about the mysterious affair at Reichenbach Falls. In 1982, I wasn't delighted when Spock died in *Star Trek II* (but he got better, too). I'm already on record in my editorial past as being displeased with the deaths of Tasha Yar, several S.H.I.E.L.D. agents (in a misconceived Marvel Comics series), various associates of the Shadow (in a Howard Chaykin DC Comics mini-series) and Pilot (in TV's *Captain Power*). Can't say I'm crazy about such later "finalities" as the deaths of Sarek, Hercule Poirot, Ben Sisko, Joxer, Alex, Odin (in Marvel's recent *Thor*), Inspector Morse, Richard Bolitho or Mrs. Landingham either.

Those characters all still had potential. Fictionally speaking, they might have just



kept on trucking. We need *not*, I believe, have been privy to their endings, the events which bring closure to their sagas and make us bear witness to these pseudo-sorrows.

We're diminished enough, I think, when our *real* heroes—actual, living, breathing human beings—die (as all we must). We're troubled, saddened, devastated enough when we have to say farewell to those people we never met who inspired, influenced and entertained us, and especially to friends and family we know so well and cherish.

So, keeping that all in mind, I wonder: Is it **really necessary** to kill our fictional heroes as well?

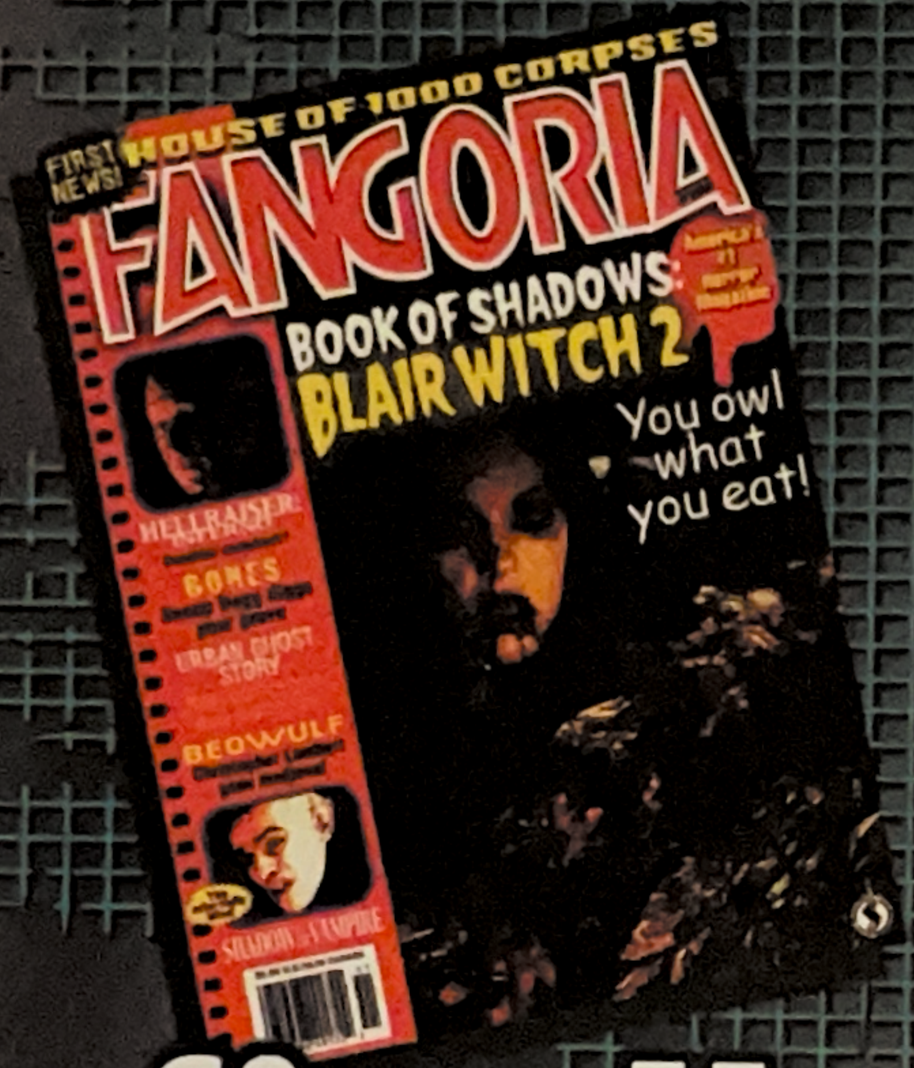
Why not let them live on so that Xena & Gabrielle (and Hercules & Iolaus) are forever off on a new adventure...so that Kirk, Spock & beloved McCoy (and Picard, Data & crew, Sisko & company, Janeway & friends) can be somewhere out there endlessly exploring...so that Batman, Spider-Man, Captain America and Superman continue to fight the unending battle for truth, justice and the American way...so that for Inspector Morse, Hercule Poirot and Sherlock Holmes, the game is *always* afoot.

Is it a game?

Guess not.

—David McDonnell/Editor
(September 2001)

Art: Jason Yungbluth



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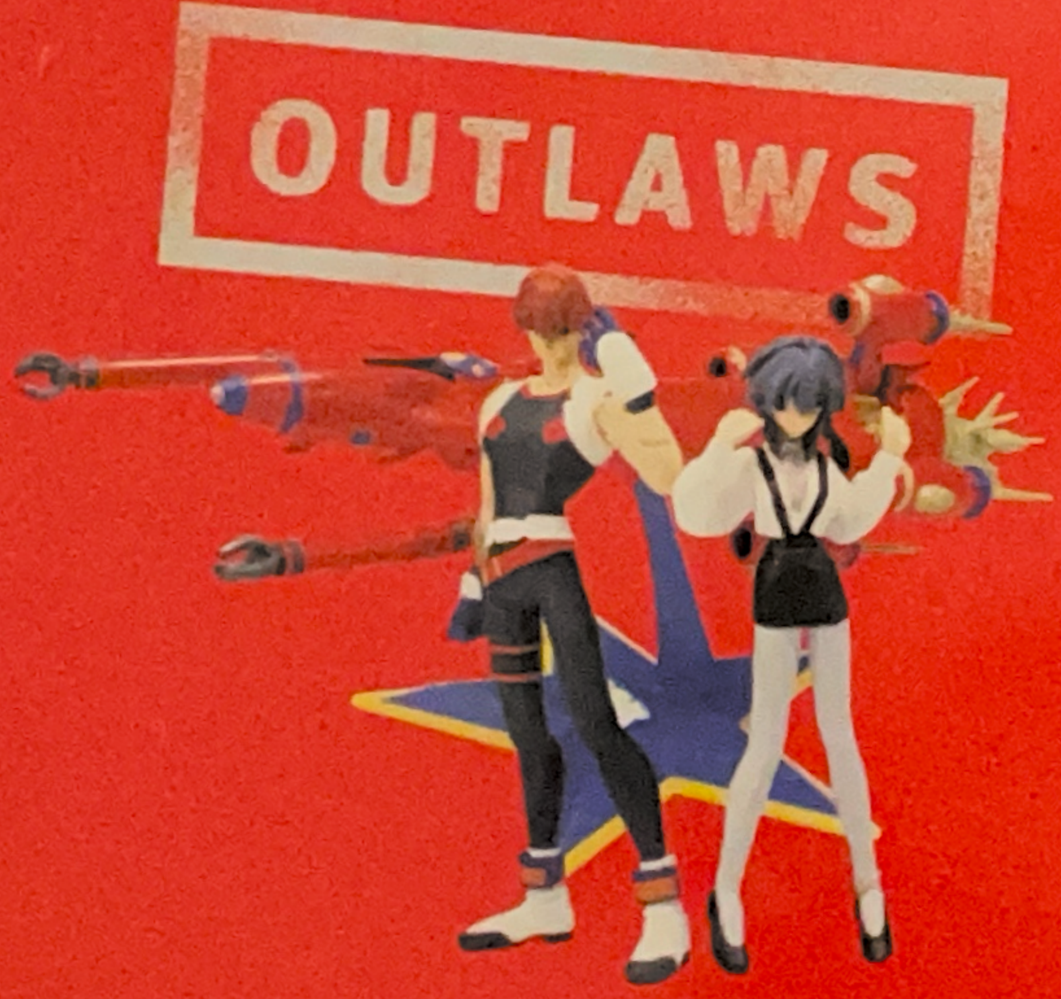

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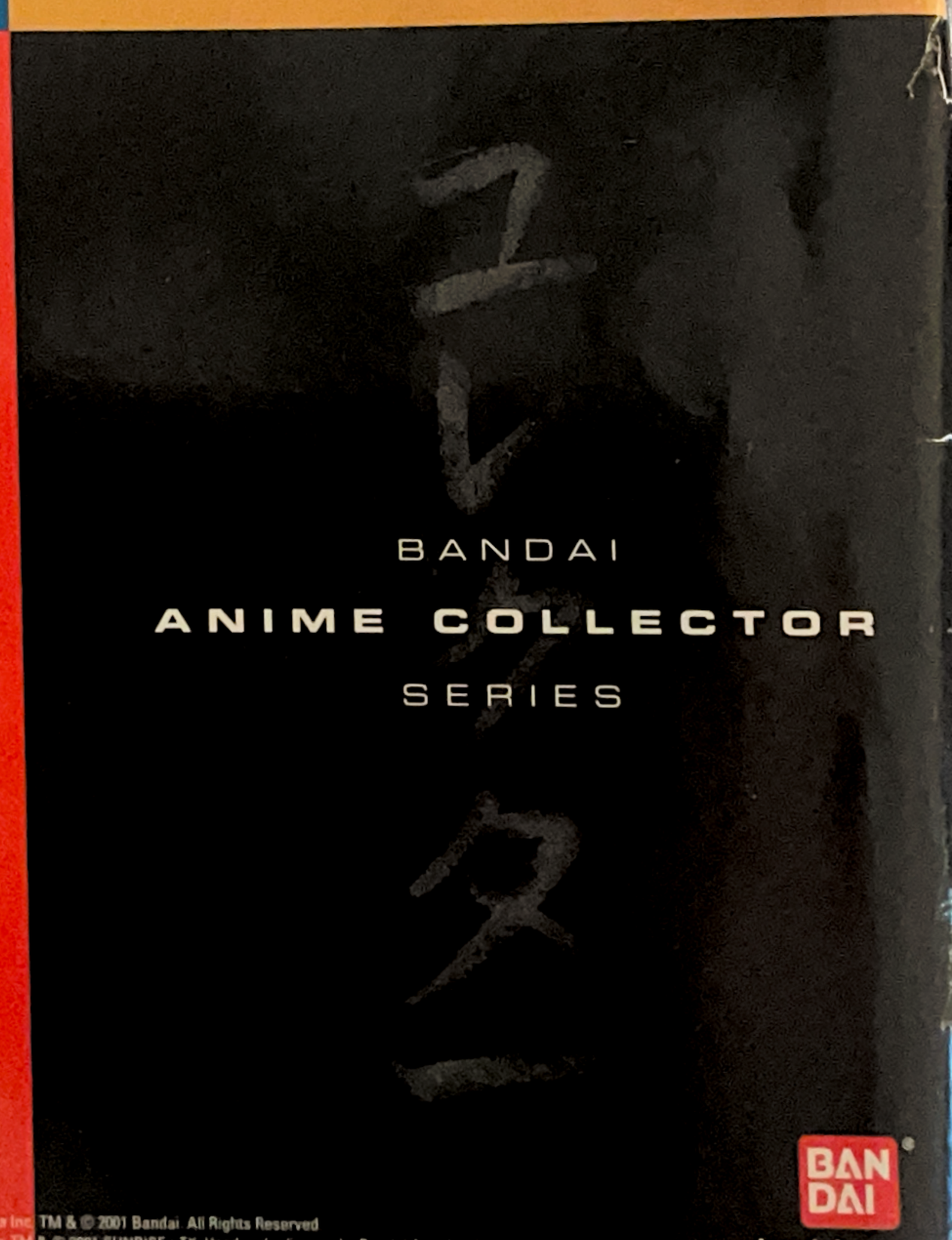

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